

COURT NO. 1
ARMED FORCES TRIBUNAL
PRINCIPAL BENCH, NEW DELHI

72.

MA 502/2025 IN OA 1893/2023

Ex Rect Suresh L Banni Applicant
Versus
Union of India & Ors. Respondents

For Applicant : Mr. Bikrama Sah, Advocate
For Respondents : Mr. Govind Narayan, Advocate

CORAM

HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE RAJENDRA MENON, CHAIRPERSON
HON'BLE REAR ADMIRAL DHIREN VIG, MEMBER (A)

ORDER
07.02.2025

MA 502/2025

Considering the fact that the issue involved in this matter stands covered by the judgments of this Tribunal in the case of Ex Rect Chhote Lal Vs. Union of India & Ors. (OA No.368/2021) and Lt. A.K. Thapa Vs. Union of India & Ors. (OA No.2240/2019), the prayer for early hearing of OA No.1893/2023 is allowed.

2. The MA stands disposed of.
3. The OA is taken up for hearing today itself. However, an oral prayer is made for correction of the cause title. It be done during the course of the day.

OA 1893/2023

4. Invoking the jurisdiction of this Tribunal under Section 14 of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007 (hereinafter referred to as 'AFT, Act'), the applicant has filed this OA and has made the following prayers:

“(a) To quash and set aside the impugned order No B/40502/554/2022/AG/PS-4(1st Appeal) dated 05.08.2022 as ANNEXURE A-1 (Impugned Order).

(b) To direct the respondents to grant Invalid Pension to the applicant wef 09.04.2021 for life on the basis of Hon'ble Supreme Court order dated 27.10.2017 in Civil Appeal No(S)16438-16440/2017 titled as Ex Rect Mithlesh Kumar Vs UOI & Ors and Govt of India Min of Def policy No12(06)/2019/D (Pen/Pol) dated 16.07.2020 alongwith interest @12% p.a. till final payment.

(c) Pass any other or such further order or orders as deemed fit to this Hon'ble Tribunal in order to secure the ends of justice in favour of the applicant.”

5. The applicant was enrolled in the Indian Army on 11.03.2020. As per the submissions of the applicant, while undergoing the training in September, 2020, he was presented to Military Hospital (MH), Devlali with complaints of generalized weakness, weight loss and osmotic symptoms and as per the clinical assessment of MH, Devlali dated 10.12.2020, it was recommended that the applicant 'to be placed in P5 and boarded out for **DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-1**'. Thereafter, on 10.12.2020, the Invalidment Medical Board of the applicant was conducted at MH, Devlali and

the disability of "DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-1" was assessed @ 40% and the same was held as neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service. Thereafter, on 09.04.2021, he was invalided out from service on medical grounds after rendering about 01 year and 29 days of service.

6. The initial claim of the applicant for grant of disability pension was rejected by the respondents vide their letter dated 25.01.2022. Against the said rejection, the applicant preferred a 1st Appeal dated 24.02.2022 and the same was rejected by the respondents vide their letter dated 05.08.2022. Thereafter, the applicant submitted 2nd Appeal dated 17.09.2022 against the rejection of 1st Appeal for disability pension but as submitted by the applicant neither any action has been taken nor any reply has been received by him. However, from the counter affidavit it is revealed that vide IHQ of MoD (Army) letter dated 17.06.2023 (Annexure R-2), the 2nd Appeal of the applicant got rejected and the same was communicated to the applicant vide Artillery Records letter dated 11.07.2023. Aggrieved by the decision of the respondents, the applicant has filed the instant OA. In the interest of justice, in accordance with Section 21(1) of the AFT Act, we take up the present OA.

CONTENTIONS OF THE PARTIES

7. The learned counsel for the applicant submitted that the applicant was enrolled in the Indian Army on 11.03.2020 and due to the disability of '**DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-1**' was invalided out on being found medically unfit on 09.04.2021.

8. At the time of final arguments, learned counsel for the applicant very fairly made an oral prayer that he is pressing for grant of invalid pension to the applicant since he was held to be invalided out from service and his service was cut short by the aforesaid disability, i.e., **DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-1**.

9. The learned counsel for the applicant also placed reliance on the decision of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in case of Sukhvinder Singh Vs. Union of India, Civil Appeal No.5605/2010 (2014 STPL (web) 468 SC) decided on 25.06.2014, wherein it was held that any disability not recorded at the time of recruitment must be presumed to have been caused subsequently and unless proved to the contrary to be a consequence of military service.

10. *Per contra*, the learned counsel for the respondents submitted that the applicant was discharged from service on 09.04.2021 under the clause 'medically boarded out from

service' after completion 01 year and 29 days of regular service.

11. Learned counsel for the respondents also submitted that as per Regulation 173 of Pension Regulations for the Army, 1961, Part-I, the primary condition for grant of disability pension is unless otherwise specifically provided, a disability pension may be granted to an individual who is invalided out from service on account of a disability which is attributable to or aggravated by military service and disability is assessed at 20% or more. In the instant case, percentage of disability of the applicant has been assessed @ 40% NIL for life by Invalid Medical Board, disability being neither attributable to nor aggravated by military service. Hence, the applicant is not entitled for disability element as stipulated in Pension Regulation for Army, 1961, (Part-I) and as such, his claim was rejected; thus, the applicant is not entitled for grant of disability pension due to policy constraints.

ANALYSIS

12. Though the applicant, through this OA, sought for the grant of the disability pension, however, during the course of hearing today, the learned counsel for the applicant sought to confine the prayer made in the OA for seeking the grant of invalid pension only. Thus, the present case is being

considered qua the prayer for the grant of invalid pension only.

13. On the careful perusal of the material available on record and also the submissions made on behalf of the parties, we are of the view that it is not in dispute that the applicant was invalidated out from service with the disease/disability '**DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-1**' before completion of terms of engagement after having served around 01 year and 29 days in the military service which was assessed by the IMB vide AFMSF-16 dated 10.12.2020 at 40% NIL for life.

14. After perusal of the records produced before us and arguments advanced by either side, we hold that the applicant is entitled to invalid pension, as the applicant was enrolled in the Army on 11.03.2020 and was invalidated out from service on medical grounds on 09.04.2021 i.e., after rendering around 01 year and 29 days of military service, which in our view is deemed invaliding from service. In this regard, reliance is placed upon Rule 197 of the Pension Regulation for the Army, 1961 which is reproduced herein below:

"197. Invalid pension/gratuity shall be admissible in accordance with the Regulations in this chapter, to

(a) an individual who is invalidated out of service on account of a disability which is neither attributable to nor aggravated by service;

(b) an individual who is though invalidated out of service on account of a disability which is attributable to or

aggravated service, but the disability is assessed at less than 20%, and

(c) a low medical category individual who is retired/discharged from service for lack of alternative employment compatible with his low medical category.”

15. Lest it be contended that the applicant being invalided out after serving around 01 year and 29 days, however, may not be eligible for getting the invalid pension as per Rule 198 of the Pension Regulation for the Army, 1961, which reads as under:

“198. The minimum period of qualifying service actually rendered and required for grant of invalid pension is 10 years. For less than 10 years actual qualifying service invalid gratuity shall be admissible.”

it is apposite to mention the order of the Armed Forces Tribunal (Regional Bench), Lucknow in *Ex. Recruit. Chhote Lal Vs. Union of India & Ors.*, in OA No.368 of 2021, wherein the MoD letter No.12(06)/2019/D(Pen-Pol) dated 16.07.2020 has been examined in detail. The said MoD letter is reproduced below:

“Subject: Provision of Invalid Pension to Armed Forces Personnel before completion of 10 years of qualifying service- Reg.

Sir,

1. Government of India, Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & pensions, Department of Pension & Pensioners, Welfare vide their O.M 21/01/2016-P&PW(F) dated 12th February 2019 has provided that a government servant, who retires from service on account of any bodily or mental infirmity which permanently incapacitates him from the service before completing qualifying service of ten years, may also be granted invalid pension subject to certain conditions.

The provisions have been based on Government of India, Gazette Notification No. 21/1/2016- P&PW(F) dated 04.01.2019.

2. The Proposal to extend the provisions of Department of Pension & Pensioners Welfare O.M No. 21/01/2016 - P&OW(F) dated 12.02.2019 to Armed Forces personnel has been under consideration of this Ministry. The undersigned is directed to state that invalid Pension would henceforth also be admissible to Armed Forces Personnel with less than 10 years of qualifying service in cases where personnel are invalidated out of service on account of any bodily or mental infirmity which is Neither Attributable to Nor Aggravated by Military Service and which permanently incapacities them from military service as well as civil reemployment.

3. Pension Regulation of the Services will be amended in due course.

4. The provision of this letter shall apply to those Armed Forces Personnel were / are in service on or after 04.01.2019. The Cases in respect of personnel who were invalidated out from service before 04.01.2019 will not be re-opened.

5. All other terms and conditions shall remain unchanged."

The AFT, Regional Bench, Lucknow while disposing of the OA No.368 of 2021 (supra) has examined Para 4 of the MoD letter dated 16.07.2020 and has held the said Para 4 of the letter as unconstitutional on the grounds that:

"20...

letter dated 16.07.2020 fails to meet the aforesaid twin test. The letter arbitrarily denies the benefit of invalid pension to those armed forces personnel, who happened to be invalidated out from service prior to 04.01.2020. There cannot be any difference on the ground of invalidment as both in the cases of personnel invalidated out before and after 04.01.2020 (ought to be read as 04.01.2019), they faced the similar consequences. In fact, the persons who have retired prior to 04.01.2020 (ought to be read as 04.01.2019) have faced more difficulties as compared to the persons invalidated out on or after 04.01.2020. The longer period of suffering cannot be

a ground to deny the benefit by way of a policy, which is supposed to be beneficial. Such a provision amounts to adding salt to injury.

21. ...

22. *As per policy letter of Govt. of India, Ministry of Def dated 16.07.2020, there is a cut of date for grant of invalid pension. As per para 4 of policy letter, "provision of this letter shall apply to those Armed Forces Personnel who were/ are in service on or after 04.01.2019". Para 4 of impugned policy letter dated 16.07.2020 is thus liable to be quashed being against principles of natural justice as such discrimination has been held to be ultra vires by the Hon'ble Apex Court because the introduction of such cut of date fails the test of reasonableness of classification prescribed by the Hon'ble Apex Court viz (i) that the classification must be founded on an intelligible differentia which distinguishes persons or things that are grouped together from those that are left out of the group; and (ii) that differentia must have a rational relation to the objects sought to be achieved by the statute in question.*

23. *From the foregoing discussions, it may be concluded that the policy pertaining to invalid pension vide letter date 16.07.2020 will be applicable in the case of the applicant also as para 4 of the letter cannot discriminate against the petitioner based on a cut of date.*

....."

16. Significantly vide judgment dated 07.01.2025 of the Hon'ble Division Bench of the High Court of Punjab and Haryana in CWP No.28442/2023 in Union of India & Ors. Vs. No. 8994857B Ex. AC UT Sandeep Kumar and Anr., the cut-off date of 04.01.2019 for grant of invalid pension only to those who *'were/are in service on or after 04.01.2019'* vide the MOD letter dated 16.07.2020 bearing reference No.12(06)/2019/D(Pen/Pol) has been observed to be arbitrary not being based on any intelligible differentia with

no nexus to the objects thereto, as observed vide Para 14 of the said judgment which reads to the effect: -

“14. Conspicuously also when the prescription as made in Annexure P-4, contents whereof become extracted hereinafter, thus on plain reading thereof, after making relaxations in the period of rendition of service, yet makes a cut-off date, vis-a-vis, the applications thereof. However, the prescriptions therein vis-a-vis the apposite cut-off date for the benefits thereof becoming assigned to the concerned, but also is rather arbitrary. The reason for so concluding stems from the factum that since the soldier qua whom the benefits of Annexure P-4, become purveyed when do constitute a homogeneous in-segregable class. Resultantly each member of the homogeneous class was to be co equally endowed the benefits of Annexure P-4. Therefore, the segregations created through Annexure P-4, thus amongst the same class, rather through the makings therein of a cut-off date, and that too when the said cut-off date, is not based on any intelligible differentia nor when it has any nexus with the beneficent thereto objects, but are required to be discountenanced.

“4. The provision of this letter shall apply to those Armed Forces Personnel who were/are in service on or after 04.01.2019. The cases in respect of personnel who were invalidated out from service before 04.01.2019 will not be re-opened.”

17. To this effect, reliance is also placed on Para 27 of the order of Lt. A.K. Thapa Vs. Union of India & Ors., in OA No.2240/2019, and Para 27 thereof of the said order reads as under: -

“...

27. In view of the law laid down by the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Sukhvinder Singh v. Union of India (2014 STPL (WEB) 468 decided on 25.06.2014 (Supra) and in Balbir Singh (Supra) on invalidment, the personnel of the Armed Forces who is invalidated out is presumed to have been so invalidated out with a minimum of twenty percent disability which in terms of the verdict in Sukhvinder Singh (Supra) is to be broad-banded to 50% for life, the incorporation by the

respondents vide the MoD letter dated 16.07.2020 of a term of a necessary permanent incapacity for civil re-employment, is an apparent overreach on the verdict of the Hon'ble Supreme Court in Sukhvinder Singh (Supra). Furthermore, the said clause of a requirement of an Armed Forces Personnel to be permanently incapacitated from Military service as well as Civil re-employment is wholly vague and arbitrary and does not take into account the extent of incapacity for Civil reemployment. This is so for the personnel of the Armed Forces who is invalidated out with all limbs incapacitated may still have a functional brain and functional voice, may be able to speak, sing, paint and earn a livelihood. The utilization of the words 'permanently incapacitates from civil re-employment, apparently requires a permanent brain-dead armed forces personnel. We thus hold that the requirement of the Armed Forces Personnel 'to be permanently incapacitated from civilian employment as well' (apart from permanent incapacitation from military service) for the grant of invalid pension in terms of the MoD letter No. 12(06) /2019 /D (Pen/Pol) dated 16.07.2020 to be wholly arbitrary and unconstitutional and violative of Article 14 of the Constitution of India which is in Part-III of the Fundamental Rights with the sub heading thereto of 'Right to Equality', and lays down to the effect:-

"14. Equality before law - The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India.

Article 21 of the Constitution of India lays down to the effect: -

"21. Protection of life and personal liberty - No person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to procedure established by law."

18. It is essential to observe that, the Hon'ble Delhi High Court vide judgment dated 26.11.2024 in W.P.(C) No.13577/2024 titled Lt. A K Thappa Vs. Union of India and Ors., in the matter of NO 40634Z LT A K THAPA (RELEASED) Vs. UNION OF INDIA & ORS., arising out of the decision of

this Tribunal in OA No.2240 of 2019 has upheld the decision of this Tribunal, for the grant of invalid pension to the applicant, vide Paras 25 and 29 of the judgement. Paras 25 and 29 of the said judgement respectively read as follows:

“25. The learned AFT also referred to the answers provided by the Commanding Officer of INS Virbahu, Visakhapatnam on 21.09.1982 and found that since 10.02.1982, the petitioner had been performing ‘Sedentary Duties Ashore’ and he was not assigned to a submarine or sailing duties. The learned AFT took note of responses of the said Commanding Officer, stating that petitioner’s disability was neither attributable to nor aggravated by service. It also noted the response of IMB proceedings of March, 1982, that the petitioner’s disability existed before entering the service, thus referring to all of the above, the learned AFT concluded that petitioner’s disability cannot be held to be attributable to nor aggravated by Military service in the peculiar facts and circumstances of the case. The learned AFT, thus, passed a detailed and reasoned Order after noting all the submissions of the parties, the decisions cited before it, as well as the documents produced for its perusal and consequently, granted Invalid Pension to the petitioner, however, not the Disability element of Pension.”

29. In light of these circumstances, we are constrained to hold that there is no infirmity in the Impugned Order passed by the learned AFT and it would not be appropriate for this Court to interfere with the order passed by it, specifically when the order passed is well reasoned.”

19. Furthermore, vide judgement dated 11.12.2024 of the Hon’ble High Court of Delhi, W.P. (C) No.17139/2024, filed by the Union of India, to assail the order dated 07.07.2023 in OA No.2240/2019 in Lt. AK Thapa (Released) Vs. Union of India and Ors. has been dismissed, in view of leave to appeal having been granted by this Tribunal vide order dated 17.05.2024 in OA 1721/2024 with MA

No.34608-4609/2023 to assail the order dated 07.07.2023 in OA No.2240/2019. The observations in Para 6-11 of the Hon'ble High Court of Delhi in W.P. (C) No.17139/2024 are to the effect:

"6. On the other hand, the learned counsel for the respondent, who appears on advance notice, submits that by an Order dated 17.05.2024 passed in M.A. 1721/2024 with M.A Nos. 4608-4609/2023 passed in the above OA by the learned AFT, leave has been granted to the petitioners to assail the Order dated 07.07.2023 passed in the above OA before the Supreme Court.

7. Placing reliance on Section 31(3) of the Armed Forces Tribunal Act, 2007 (in short, „AFT Act“), he submits that once leave is granted, the appeal is deemed to be pending before the Supreme Court. He submits that, therefore, this Court should not exercise its powers under Article 226 of the Constitution of India to examine the plea raised by the petitioners.

8. We have considered the submissions made by the learned counsels for the parties.

9. Section 31 of the AFT Act reads as under: -

“31. Leave to appeal.— (1) An appeal to the Supreme Court shall lie with the leave of the Tribunal; and such leave shall not be granted unless it is certified by the Tribunal that a point of law of general public importance is involved in the decision, or it appears to the Supreme Court that the point is one which ought to be considered by that Court.

(2) An application to the Tribunal for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court shall be made within a period of thirty days beginning with the date of the decision of the Tribunal and an application to the Supreme Court for leave shall be made within a period of thirty days beginning with the date on which the application for leave is refused by the Tribunal.

(3) An appeal shall be treated as pending until any application for leave to appeal is

disposed of and if leave to appeal is granted, until the appeal is disposed of; and an application for leave to appeal shall be treated as disposed of at the expiration of the time within which it might have been made, but it is not made within that time.

10. *Sub Section (3) of Section 31 of the AFT Act, creates a deeming fiction providing that if the leave to appeal is granted by the learned AFT, until the appeal is disposed of, such appeal shall be treated to be pending before the Supreme Court.*

11. *In the present case, the effect of the Order dated 17.05.2024 passed by the learned AFT, therefore, shall be that the appeal filed by the petitioners to challenge the Order dated 07.07.2023 is pending before the Supreme Court. There cannot be two alternate remedies simultaneously taken by the petitioners to challenge the same order."*

There is no stay granted so far by the Hon'ble Supreme Court of the operation of the order dated 07.07.2023 in OA No.2240/2019 of the Tribunal, in *Lt. AK Thapa (Released)* (supra).

CONCLUSION

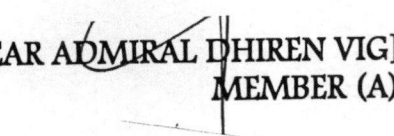
20. We find no reason to differ from the law laid down in *Chhote Lal* (supra) and in *A.K. Thapa* (supra), and we are, therefore, of the considered view that the applicant has to be deemed to be invalided out of service on account of the disability of **DIABETES MELLITUS TYPE-1** as the applicant had rendered around 01 year and 29 days of service and was invalided out before completing his term of initial engagement. Thus, the applicant is held entitled to the grant of invalid pension.

21. The respondents are thus directed to calculate, sanction and issue the necessary PPO to the applicant within a period of three months from the date of receipt of copy of this order failing which the applicant will be entitled for interest @6% p.a. from the date of receipt of copy of the order by the respondents.

22. Pending miscellaneous application(s), if any, stands closed accordingly.

23. No order as to costs.


[JUSTICE RAJENDRA MENON]
CHAIRPERSON


[REAR ADMIRAL DHIREN VIG]
MEMBER (A)

Neha